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Forest pesticide analysis delayed**Companies plan not to spray the chemicals being studied in the Triangle Lake area**

BY SUSAN PALMER*The Register-Guard***Published:** *Midnight*, April 13

TRIANGLE LAKE — A key part of an ongoing state investigation into chemical exposure among rural residents in the Triangle Lake area has been postponed.

State and federal agencies teamed up last year to figure out whether two herbicides commonly used on commercial forestlands could be drifting onto private property. Some residents have complained for years that they'd been sickened by spray drift along the Highway 36 corridor.

In a packed meeting room at the tiny Triangle Lake Grange earlier this week, exposure investigators explained the status of the study to nearly 100 residents, some vehemently anti-pesticide, others supportive of pesticide use and some who just wanted more information.

While some community members have been complaining about spray drift for a long time, it was only after an independent and respected researcher found the presence of the herbicides 2,4-D and atrazine in the urine of 36 residents last spring that state and federal agencies launched their own inquiry.

The Oregon Health Authority in concert with the state departments of Forestry and Agriculture, the federal Environmental Protection Agency and the Centers for Disease Control, planned a broad swath of tests, looking not only at the urine of residents, but taking water and soil samples and samples of garden produce, milk, eggs and even honey.

Baseline tests done in August, when no aerial herbicide spraying was going on, were meant to provide a comparison for tests this spring, when the herbicide spray season gets under way on commercially owned forests.

The August tests of more than 60 residents found no atrazine, but most had small amounts of 2,4-D, though none in concentrations high enough to be considered a threat to health.

As expected, no atrazine or 2,4-D turned up in the soil, well water or produce tested in

August.

Change of plans

But state investigators called off the spring tests of people and property because commercial forest landowners aren't spraying those two chemicals in the Triangle Lake area, according to documents that detail their plans and are required to be filed with the state.

Some residents have accused the commercial forest landowners of foiling the testing process by not using 2,4-D and atrazine as they normally would each spring.

"We predicted it in advance," said Day Owen, who heads up a loose affiliation of concerned neighbors who call themselves the Pitchfork Rebellion. "If we were industry, and we knew that (the state) was going to test to see if atrazine and 2,4-D were going to cross borders, we might try to dodge the bullet."

Weyerhaeuser, one of several corporations that own timberlands in the region, denies it has changed its spraying strategy because of the investigation. Such decisions are site-based and depend on the type of brush on the ground and how it may interfere with tree growth, Weyerhaeuser spokesman Greg Miller said.

"Nothing's different this spring," he said. "Forest chemicals are used relative to the vegetation management needs."

People tend to live along the narrow valley floor with forested slopes rising above their homes and gardens. After forests are clear-cut, land managers often bring in helicopters to spray herbicides that knock down weeds competing for light and nutrients with the newly planted trees.

But just how much the chemicals drift in the complex topography of the Coast Range is not well understood.

Air testing is complicated

While researchers are calling off the current round of tests, they aren't folding their tents and going home. They plan to turn their attention to testing the air, though those tests are hampered by the complexities of getting a system in place that can sample the air when spraying happens.

It's not as easy as it might seem.

State and federal regulations limit when spraying can occur, and weather plays a part. Landowners must alert the Oregon Department of Forestry to the location where they want to spray herbicides, and give a list of the likely products they'll be using. But they have to give only a window of time — anywhere from a few weeks to a year — when the spraying will occur.

Deploying bulky battery-powered air samplers so they can be ready when aerial spraying happens is a challenge, simply because the systems lose power fairly quickly. And

passive samplers that don't require power but are capable of detecting the two herbicides don't exist yet.

EPA researchers say they are trying to come up with a workable air sampling system but don't expect to have it in place for another year.

As for why investigators don't simply test residents for the substitute herbicides that will be used in the area this year: Such tests don't exist. The only herbicides that can be discovered through urine testing are 2,4-D and atrazine, investigators say.

Not all Triangle Lake residents are worried about spray drift.

Ann Clemp who, with her husband and son raise cattle and own forestland between Triangle Lake and Blachly, said she feels confident that timberland owners are following the law and the herbicide labels to avoid drift.

Clemp was among the residents who were tested for 2,4-D and atrazine last summer. Very little of the 2,4-D was found in their bodies, which she found reassuring.

Most everyone in the country has some chemical residue from pesticides, according to national studies.

She said she hopes the study will eventually lead to results that will finally resolve the situation.

"I think it's great that the state is doing all this, and I hope it leads to a conclusion that everyone can believe in," she said.

Some residents aren't waiting for the official air testing to begin. Dan and Marijana Gee have hired their own consultant and set up their own air sampling system and have promised to share their results with the state.

Getting labels changed

Owen, for his part, is also lobbying EPA officials in Washington, D.C., to try to get the label directions for herbicides changed. Right now there is no specific label prohibition regarding drift, other than that it should be avoided.

But the EPA has been considering adding label language that would prohibit the application of pesticides in a manner that results in drift that contacts people.

Just this week, Owen received an e-mail from Jill Bloom in the EPA's Pesticide Re-evaluation Division, who acknowledged that while the response to his petition is "on hiatus," the agency is looking more closely at how it can mitigate risk of drift.

Back in Oregon, the state Health Authority also plans to review the records of which pesticides have actually been applied, and where, on Triangle Lake area forests.

The state doesn't keep such records; individual landowners do and must maintain them for three years.

The Health Authority expects to have those documents by the end of this month, and to release an interim report on its progress sometime in the summer.

PESTICIDE SPRAY INVESTIGATION

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